The Singing Man

BY

JOSEPHINE PRESTON PEABODY

author of

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BY

Josephine Preston Peabody

(*Mrs. Lionel Marks*)

The Singing Man

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"Your songs? Oh! The little mothers
Will sing them in the twilight,
. . . Then the little rabbit folk
That some call children,
Such as are up and wide
Will laugh your verses to each other,
Pulling on their shoes for the day's business,
Serious child business that the world
Laughs at, and grows stale;
Such is the tale
— Part of it — of thy song-life."

Ezra Pound, in "A Lume Spento."

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RICH MAN, POOR MAN

'Rich man, Poor man, Beggar man, Thief,
Doctor, Lawyer, Merchant, Chief.'

I

Highway, stretched along the sun,
Highway, thronged till day is done;
Where the drifting Face replaces
Wave on wave on wave of faces,
And you count them, one by one:
'Rich man — Poor man — Beggar man — Thief:
Doctor — Lawyer — Merchant — Chief.'
Is it soothsay? — Is it fun?

Young ones, like as wave and wave;
Old ones, like as grave and grave;
Tide on tide of human faces
With what human undertow!
Rich man, poor man, beggar-man, thief! —
Tell me of the eddying spaces,
Show me where the lost ones go;
Like and lost, as leaf and leaf.

What's your secret grim refrain
Back and forth and back again,
Once, and now, and always so?
Three days since, and who was Thief?
Three days more, and who 'll be Chief?
Oh, is that beyond belief,
Doctor, Lawyer — Merchant-Chief?

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[Houghton Mifflin Co.]

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Josephine Preston Peabody

(Mrs. Lionel Marks)

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MARLOWE: A DRAMA.

FORTUNE AND MEN'S EYES.

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HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

Boston and New York

THE SINGING MAN

The Singing Man

A Book of Songs and Shadows

By Josephine Preston Peabody

BOSTON and *NEW YORK*
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1911

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FOREWORD

We make our songs as we must, from fragments of the joy and sorrow of living. What Life itself may be, we cannot know till all men share the chance to know.

Until the day of some more equal portion, there is no human brightness unhaunted by this black shadow : the thought of those unnumbered who pay all the heavier cost of life, to live and die without knowledge that there is any Joy of Living.

No song could face such blackness, but for the will to share, and for hope of the day of sharing.

Upon that hope and that mindfulness, the poems in this book are linked together.

J. P. M.

4 October, 1911.

CONTENTS

THE SINGING MAN 3

THE TREES 15

O, do you remember? How it came to be? . . . 21

RICH MAN, POOR MAN 23

But we did walk in Eden 29

THE FOUNDLING 31

Love sang to me. And I went down the stair . . 35

THE FEASTER 37

Belovèd, if the moon could weep 43

THE GOLDEN SHOES 45

NOON AT PÆSTUM 47

VESTAL FLAME 48

The dark had left no speech save hand-in-hand . 51

THE PROPHET 53

THE LONG LANE 56

Ah but, Belovèd, men may do 59

ALISON'S MOTHER TO THE BROOK . . . 61

You, Four Walls, wall not in my heart! . . 65

CANTICLE OF THE BABE 67

And thou, Wayfaring Woman whom I meet . . 73

GLADNESS 75

THE NIGHTINGALE UNHEARD 81

Envoi 87

THE SINGING MAN

An Ode of the Portion of Labor

'The profit of the Earth is for all.'

— Ecclesiastes.

THE SINGING MAN

I

HE sang above the vineyards of the world.
And after him the vines with woven hands
Clambered and clung, and everywhere unfurled
Triumphing green above the barren lands;
Till high as gardens grow, he climbed, he stood,
Sun-crowned with life and strength, and singing toil,
And looked upon his work; and it was good:
The corn, the wine, the oil.

He sang above the noon. The topmost cleft
That grudged him footing on the mountain scars
He planted and despaired not; till he left
His vines soft breathing to the host of stars.
He wrought, he tilled; and even as he sang,
The creatures of his planting laughed to scorn
The ancient threat of deserts where there sprang
The wine, the oil, the corn!

He sang not for abundance. — Over-lords
  Took of his tilth. Yet was there still to reap,
The portion of his labor; dear rewards
  Of sunlit day, and bread, and human sleep.
He sang for strength; for glory of the light.
  He dreamed above the furrows, 'They are
    mine!'
When all he wrought stood fair before his sight
      With corn, and oil, and wine.

Truly, the light is sweet
  Yea, and a pleasant thing
    It is to see the Sun.
And that a man should eat
    His bread that he hath won; —
(*So is it sung and said*),
  That he should take and keep,
    After his laboring,
The portion of his labor in his bread,
  His bread that he hath won;
  Yea, and in quiet sleep,
    When all is done.

He sang; above the burden and the heat,
  Above all seasons with their fitful grace;
Above the chance and change that led his feet
  To this last ambush of the Market-place.

'Enough for him,' they said — and still they say —
'A crust, with air to breathe, and sun to shine;
He asks no more!' — Before they took away
The corn, the oil, the wine.

He sang. No more he sings now, anywhere.
Light was enough, before he was undone.
They knew it well, who took away the air,
— Who took away the sun;
Who took, to serve their soul-devouring greed,
Himself, his breath, his bread — the goad of toil; —
Who have and hold, before the eyes of Need,
The corn, the wine, — the oil!

Truly, one thing is sweet
Of things beneath the Sun;
This, that a man should earn his bread and eat,
Rejoicing in his work which he hath done.
What shall be sung or said
Of desolate deceit,
When others take his bread;
His and his children's bread? —
And the laborer hath none.

This, for his portion now, of all that he hath done.
He earns; and others eat.
He starves; — they sit at meat
Who have taken away the Sun.

II

Seek him now, that singing Man.
Look for him,
Look for him
In the mills,
In the mines;
Where the very daylight pines, —
He, who once did walk the hills!
You shall find him, if you scan
Shapes all unbefitting Man,
Bodies warped, and faces dim.
In the mines; in the mills
Where the ceaseless thunder fills
Spaces of the human brain
Till all thought is turned to pain.
Where the skirl of wheel on wheel,
Grinding him who is their tool,
Makes the shattered senses reel
To the numbness of the fool.
Perisht thought, and halting tongue —

(Once it spoke; — once it sung!)
Live to hunger, dead to song.
Only heart-beats loud with wrong
Hammer on, — *How long?*
. . . *How long?* — *How long?*

Search for him;
Search for him;
Where the crazy atoms swim
Up the fiery furnace-blast.
You shall find him, at the last, —
He whose forehead braved the sun, —
Wreckt and tortured and undone.
Where no breath across the heat
Whispers him that life was sweet;
But the sparkles mock and flare,
Scattering up the crooked air.
(Blackened with that bitter mirk, —
Would God know His handiwork?)

Thought is not for such as he;
Naught but strength, and misery;
Since, for just the bite and sup,
Life must needs be swallowed up.
Only, reeling up the sky,
Hurtling flames that hurry by,

Gasp and flare, with *Why* — *Why*,
. . . *Why?* . . .

Why the human mind of him
Shrinks, and falters and is dim
When he tries to make it out:
What the torture is about. —
Why he breathes, a fugitive
Whom the World forbids to live.
Why he earned for his abode,
Habitation of the toad!
Why his fevered day by day
Will not serve to drive away
Horror that must always haunt: —
. . . *Want* . . . *Want!*
Nightmare shot with waking pangs; —
Tightening coil, and certain fangs,
Close and closer, always nigh . . .
. . . *Why?* . . . *Why?*

Why he labors under ban
That denies him for a man.
Why his utmost drop of blood
Buys for him no human good;
Why his utmost urge of strength
Only lets Them starve at length; —

Will not let him starve alone;
He must watch, and see his own
Fade and fail, and starve, and die.

. . . . . .
. . . *Why?* . . . *Why?*
. . . . . .

Heart-beats, in a hammering song,
Heavy as an ox may plod,
Goaded — goaded — faint with wrong,
Cry unto some ghost of God
. . . *How long?* . . . *How long?*
. . . . . *How long?*

III

Seek him yet. Search for him!
You shall find him, spent and grim;
In the prisons, where we pen
These unsightly shards of men.
Sheltered fast;
Housed at length;
Clothed and fed, no matter how! —
Where the householders, aghast,
Measure in his broken strength
Nought but power for evil, now.
Beast-of-burden drudgeries

Could not earn him what was his:
He who heard the world applaud
Glories seized by force and fraud,
He must break, — he must take! —
Both for hate and hunger's sake.
He must seize by fraud and force;
He must strike, without remorse!
Seize he might; but never keep.
Strike, his once! — Behold him here.
(Human life we buy so cheap,
Who should know we held it dear?)

No denial, — no defence
From a brain bereft of sense,
Any more than penitence.
But the heart-beats now, that plod
Goaded — goaded — dumb with wrong,
Ask not even a ghost of God
. . . . . *How long?*

When the Sea gives up its dead,
Prison caverns, yield instead
This, rejected and despised;
This, the Soiled and Sacrificed!
Without form or comeliness;
Shamed for us that did transgress;

Bruised, for our iniquities,
With the stripes that are all his!
Face that wreckage, you who can.
It was once the Singing Man.

IV

Must it be? — Must we then
Render back to God again
This His broken work, this thing,
For His man that once did sing?
Will not all our wonders do?
Gifts we stored the ages through,
(Trusting that He had forgot) —
Gifts the Lord requirèd not?

Would the all-but-human serve!
Monsters made of stone and nerve;
Towers to threaten and defy
Curse or blessing of the sky;
Shafts that blot the stars with smoke;
Lightnings harnessed under yoke;
Sea-things, air-things, wrought with steel,
That may smite, and fly, and feel!
Oceans calling each to each;
Hostile hearts, with kindred speech.

Every work that Titans can;
Every marvel: save a man,
Who might rule without a sword. —
Is a man more precious, Lord?

Can it be? — Must we then
Render back to Thee again
Million, million wasted men?
Men, of flickering human breath,
Only made for life and death?

Ah, but see the sovereign Few,
Highly favored, that remain!
These, the glorious residue,
Of the cherished race of Cain.
These, the magnates of the age,
High above the human wage,
Who have numbered and possesst
All the portion of the rest!

What are all despairs and shames,
What the mean, forgotten names
Of the thousand more or less,
For one surfeit of success?

For those dullest lives we spent,
Take these Few magnificent!

For that host of blotted ones,
Take these glittering central suns.
Few; — but how their lustre thrives
On the million broken lives!
Splendid, over dark and doubt,
For a million souls gone out!
These, the holders of our hoard, —
Wilt thou not accept them, Lord?

V

Oh, in the wakening thunders of the heart,
— The small lost Eden, troubled through the night,
Sounds there not now, — forboded and apart,
Some voice and sword of light?
Some voice and portent of a dawn to break? —
Searching like God, the ruinous human shard
Of that lost Brother-man Himself did make,
And Man himself hath marred?

It sounds! — And may the anguish of that birth
Seize on the world; and may all shelters fail,
Till we behold new Heaven and new Earth
Through the rent Temple-vail!

When the high-tides that threaten near and far
To sweep away our guilt before the sky, —
Flooding the waste of this dishonored Star,
Cleanse, and o'erwhelm, and cry! —

Cry, from the deep of world-accusing waves,
With longing more than all since Light began,
Above the nations, — underneath the graves, —
'Give back the Singing Man!'

THE TREES

I

NOW, in the thousandth year,
When April's near,
Now comes it that the great ones of the earth
Take all their mirth
Away with them, far off, to orchard-places, —
Nor they nor Solomon arrayed like these, —
To sun themselves at ease;
To breathe of wind-swept spaces;
To see some miracle of leafy graces; —
To catch the out-flowing rapture of the trees.
Considering the lilies.
— Yes. And when
Shall they consider Men?

(*O showering May-clad tree,*
Bear yet awhile with me.)

II

For now at last, they have beheld the trees.
Lo, even these! —
The men of sounding laughter and low fears;
The women of light laughter, and no tears;
The great ones of the town.
And those, of most renown,
That once sold doves, — now grown so penny-wise
To bargain with forlorner merchandise, —
They buy and sell, they buy and sell again,
The life-long toil of men.
Worn with their market strife to dispossess
The blind, — the fatherless,
They too go forth, to breathe of budding trees,
And woods with beckoning wonders new unfurled.
Yes, even these:
The money-changers and the Pharisees;
The rulers of the darkness of this world.

(*O choiring Summer tree,*
Bear yet awhile with me.)

III

For now, behold their heart's desire is thrall
To simpleness. — O new delight, unguessed,
In very rest!
And precious beyond all,
A garden-place, a garden with a wall!
To the green earth! All bountiful to bless
Hearts sickening with excess.
To the green earth, whose blithe replenishments
Shall fresh the jaded sense!
To the green earth, the dust-corrupted soul
Returns to be made whole.
For now it comes indeed,
They will go forth, all they, to see a reed
So shaken by the wind.
Men are no longer blind
To aught, save human kind.

(*O mellowing August tree,*
Bear yet awhile with me.)

IV

The wonder this. For some there are no trees;
Or in the trees no beauty and no mirth: —

Those dullest millions, pent
In life-long banishment
From all the gifts and creatures of the earth,
Shut in the inner darkness of the town;
Those blighted things you see,
But the Sun sees not, at its going down: —
Warped outcasts of some human forestry;
Blind victims of the blind,
Wreckt ones and dark of mind,
With the poor fruit, after their piteous kind.
And if you take some Old One to the fields,
To see what Nature yields
With fullest hands to men already free,
It well may be,
As on some indecipherable book
The Guest will look,
With eyes too old, — too old, too dim to see;
Too old, too old to learn;
Or to discern —
Before it slips away,
The joy of such a late half-holiday!
Proffer those starved eyes your belated cup:
They look not up.
Too late, too late for any sky to do
Brief kindness with its blue.

And what behold they, then?
In the shamed moment, when
Old eyes bow down again?

Down in the night and blackness of the heart,
The drowned things start.
And he recks nothing of the meadow air,
Because of what is There.
Lost things of hope and sorrow without tongue:
The human lilies, sprung
Out of the ooze, and trodden,
Even as they breathed and clung!
Lost lilies, bruised and sodden;
Lost faces, gleaming there,
Where misery blasphemes the sacred young!
Mute outcry, most, of those
Small suffering hands defrauded of their rose;
Faces the daylight shuns;
Ruinous faces of the little ones,—
Pale witness, unaware.
Starved lips, and withering blood—
O broken in the bud!—
Blank eyes, and blighted hair.

(*O golden, golden tree!*
Bear yet awhile with me.)

So is it, haply, when
Dull eyes look up, and then
Dull eyes look down again.
Waste no vain holiday on such as these;
For them there is no joy in blossomed trees.

V

For them there is no joy in blossomed trees.
And with what eye-shut ease
We leave them, at the last, for company,
The Tree,
Whose two stark boughs no springtime yet unfurled,
Ever, since time began;
Nor bloom so strange to see! —
Behold, the Man,
With His two arms outstretched to fold the world.

O, do you remember? — How it came to be?
Far, golden windows gazing from the shore;
Golden ebb of daylight; heart could hold no more:
Belovèd and Belovèd, and the sea.

Westward the sun, — low, slow and golden;
Eastward the moon climbed, honey-pale.
O do you remember? while our eyes were holden,
Close, close upon us, — the Golden Sail?
Wind-swift she came, — thing of living flame,
Sea-breathing Glory, to make the heart afraid!
The ripples, fold on fold
Of coiling gold,
Trailing a thousand ways
Her golden maze,
Rocked in a golden tumult, every one,
The gondolas, the ships . .
Westward she made . . . . .
A portent from the sky, — gone by, gone by,
To golden, far eclipse; . . .
Into the Sun.

Behold, a mystery
That shook to golden throbbing all the sea.
Oh, and what needed one more wonder be
For thee and me, Belovèd? thee and me?

RICH MAN, POOR MAN

'Rich man, Poor man, Beggar man, Thief,
Doctor, Lawyer, Merchant, Chief.'

I

HIGHWAY, stretched along the sun,
Highway, thronged till day is done;
Where the drifting Face replaces
Wave on wave on wave of faces,
And you count them, one by one:
'*Rich man — Poor man — Beggar man —*
Thief:
Doctor — Lawyer — Merchant — Chief.'
Is it soothsay? — Is it fun?

Young ones, like as wave and wave;
Old ones, like as grave and grave;
Tide on tide of human faces
With what human undertow!
Rich man, poor man, beggar-man, thief! —
Tell me of the eddying spaces,

Show me where the lost ones go;
Like and lost, as leaf and leaf.
What's your secret grim refrain
Back and forth and back again,
Once, and now, and always so?
Three days since, and who was Thief?
Three days more, and who 'll be Chief?
Oh, is that beyond belief,
Doctor, Lawyer — Merchant-Chief?

(*Down, like grass before the mowing;*
On, like wind in its mad going:—
Wind and dust forever blowing.)

Highway, shrill with murderous pride,
Highway, of the swarming tide!
Why should my way lead me deeper?
I am not my Brother's keeper.

II

Byway, ambushed with the dark,
Byway, where the ears may hark;
Live and fierce when day is done,
You, that do without the Sun:—
What 's this game you bring to nought?—

Muttering like a thing distraught,
Reckoning like a simpleton?
(Since the hearing must be brief, —
Living or a dying thief!)
Cobbled with the anguished stones
That the thoroughfare disowns;
Stones they gave you for your bread
Of the disinherited!
Where the Towers of Hunger loom,
Crowding in the dregs of doom;
Where the lost sky peering through
Sees no more the grudging grass, —
Only this mud-mirrored blue,
Like some shattered looking-glass.

(*Under, with the sorry reaping!*
Underneath the stones of weeping,
For the Dark to have in keeping.)

Byway, you, so foully marred;
You, whose sodden walls and scarred,
See no light, but only where
Fevered lamps are set to stare
In the eyes of such despair!
Tell me — as a Byway can —
Was this Beggar once a Man?

'*Rich man — Poor man — Beggar man — Thief!*'
Like and lost as leaf and leaf.
Stammering out your wrongs and shames,
Must you cry their very names?
Must you sob your shame, your grief?
—'*Poor man — Poor man! — Beggar — Thief.*'

III

Highway, where the Sun is wide;
Byway, where the lost ones hide,
Byway, where the Soul must hark,
Byway, dreadful with the Dark:
    Can you nothing do with Man?
Doctor, Lawyer, Merchant, Chief,
Learns he nothing, even of grief?
Must it still be all his wonder
Some men soar, while some go under?
He has heard, and he has seen:
Make him know the thing you mean.
He has prayed since time began, —
He 's so curious of the Plan!
He will pray you till he die,
For the Whence and for the Why;
Mad for wisdom — when 't is cheaper!

'*Why should my way lead me deeper?*
Am I, then, my Brother's keeper?'

Show him, Byway, if you can;
Lest he end as he began,
Rich and poor, — this beggar, Man.

But we did walk in Eden,
Eden, the garden of God;—
There, where no beckoning wonder
Of all the paths we trod,
No choiring sun-filled vineyard,
No voice of stream or bird,
But was some radiant oracle
And flaming with the Word!

Mine ears are dim with voices;
Mine eyes yet strive to see
The black things here to wonder at,
The mirth,—the misery.
Beloved, who wert with me there,
How came these shames to be?—
On what lost star are we?

Men say: The paths of gladness
By men were never trod!—
But we have walked in Eden,
Eden, the garden of God.

THE FOUNDLING

BEAUTIFUL Mother, I have toiled all day;
And I am wearied. And the day is done.
Now, while the wild brooks run
Soft by the furrows — fading, gold to gray,
Their laughters turned to musing — ah, let me
Hide here my face at thine unheeding knee,
Beautiful Mother; if I be thy son.

The birds fly low. Gulls, starlings, hoverers,
Along the meadows and the paling foam,
All wings of thine that roam
Fly down, fly down. One reedy murmur blurs
The silence of the earth; and from the warm
Face of the field the upward savors swarm
Into the darkness. And the herds are home.

All they are stalled and folded for their rest,
The creatures: cloud-fleece young that leap and veer;
Mad-mane and gentle ear;
And breath of loving-kindness. And that best,—

O shaggy house-mate, watching me from far,
With human-aching heart, as I a star —
Tempest of plumèd joys, just to be near!

So close, so like, so dear; and whom I love
More than thou lovest them, or lovest me.
So beautiful to see,
Ah, and to touch! When those far lights above
Scorch me with farness — lights that call and call
To the far heart, and answer not at all;
Save that they will not let the darkness be.

And what am I? That I alone of these
Make me most glad at noon? That I should mark
The after-glow go dark?
This hour to sing — but never have — heart's-ease!
That when the sorrowing winds fly low, and croon
Outside our happy windows their old rune,
Beautiful Mother, I must wake, and hark?

Who am I? Why for me this iron *Must?*
Burden the moon-white ox would never bear;
Load that he cannot share,

He, thine imperial hostage of the dust.
Else should I look to see the god's surprise
Flow from his great unscornful, lovely eyes —
The ox thou gavest to partake my care.

Yea, all they bear their yoke of sun-filled hours.
I, lord at noon, at nightfall no more free,
Take on more heavily
The yoke of hid, intolerable Powers.
— Then pushes here, in my forgetful hand,
This near one's breathless plea to understand.
Starward I look; he, even so, at me!

And she who shines within my house, my sight
Of the heart's eyes, my hearth-glow, and my rain,
My singing's one refrain —
Are there for her no tidings from the height?
For her, my solace, likewise lost and far,
Islanded with me here, on this lone star
Washed by the ceaseless tides of dark and light.

What shall it profit, that I built for her
A little wayside shelter from the stark
Sky that we hear, and mark?

Lo, in her eyes all dreams that ever were!
And cheek-to-cheek with me she shares the quest,
Her heart, as mine for her, sole tented rest
From light to light of day; from dark — till Dark.

Yea, but for her, how should I greatly care
Whither and whence? But that the dark should blast
Our bright! To hold her fast, —
Yet feel this dread creep gray along the air.
To know I cannot hold her so my own,
But under surge of joy, the surges moan
That threaten us with parting at the last!

Beautiful Mother, I am not thy son.
I know from echoes far behind the sky.
I know; I know not why.
Even from thy golden, wide oblivion:
Thy careless leave to help thy harvesting,
Thy leave to work a little, live, and sing;
Thy leave to suffer — yea, to sing and die,
Beautiful Mother! . . .
Ah, Whose child am I?

Love sang to me. And I went down the stair,
And out into the darkness and the dew;
And bowed myself unto the little grass,
And the blind herbs, and the unshapen dust
Of earth without a face. So let me be.

For as I hear, the singing makes of me
My own desire, and momently I grow.
Yea, all the while with hands of melody,
The singing makes me, out of what I was,
Even as a potter shaping Eden clay.

Ever Love sings, and saith in words that sing,
'Beloved, thus art thou; and even so
Lovely art thou, Beloved!' — Even so,
As the Sea weaves her path before the light,
I hear, I hear, and I am glorified.

Love sang to me, and I am glorified
Because of some commandment in the stars.
And I shall grow in favour and in shining,
Till at the last I am all-beautiful;
Beautiful, for the day Love sings no more.

THE FEASTER

OH, who will hush that cry outside the doors,
While we are glad within?
Go forth, go forth, all you my servitors;
(And gather close, my kin.)
Go out to her. Tell her we keep a feast,—
Lost Loveliness who will not sit her down
Though we implore.
It is her silence binds me unreleased,
It is her silence that no flute can drown,
It is her moonlit silence at the door,
Wide as the whiteness, but a fire on high
That frights my heart with an immortal Cry,
Calling me evermore.

Louder, you viols;—louder, O my harp;
Let me not hear her voice;
And drown her keener silence, silver-sharp,
With waves of golden noise!
For she is wise as Eden, even mute,
To search my spirit through the deep and height
Again, again.

Outpierce her with your singing, dawnlike flute;
And you, gloom over, viols of the night
With colors lost in umber, — with sweet pain
Of richest world's desire, — prevail, sing down
All memory with pleading, so you drown
Her merciless refrain!

Oh, can you not with music, nor with din,
Save me the stress and stir
In my lone spirit, throned among my kin,
From that same voice of her? —
The never ending query she hath had
Only to wake my Soul, and only then
Wake it to weep?
With '*Why?*' and '*Art thou happy? Art thou glad?*
And hast thou fellowship with fellow-men?
So, through my mirth and underneath my sleep;
Her voice, — abysmal hunger unfulfilled; —
The calling, calling, never to be stilled, —
Calling of deep to deep.

But I have that shall fill this wound of mine,
Since Loveliness must be; —

Since Loveliness must save us, or we pine
And perish utterly.
All that the years have left us, undismayed
Of age or death; and happier fair than truth,
— When truth is fair!
Shapes of immortal sweetness, to persuade
Iron and fire and marble to their youth;
Wild graces trapped from the three kingdoms' lair
Of wildest Beauty; shadow and smile and hush;
— Fleet color, of a daybreak, of a blush,
For my sad soul to wear!

Let April fade! For me, unfading bloom! . . .
The little fruitless seed
Deep sown of fire within the midmost gloom,
A sterner fire to feed: —
The rainbow, frozen in a lasting dew;
Green-gazing emerald, fresh as grass beneath
The placid rose.
Fair pearl, and you, fair pearl, and you and you,
Rained from the moon, and kissing in a wreath,
As moment unto eager moment goes!

Look back at me, you sapphires blue and
wise
With farthest twilight, blue resplendent eyes
That never weep, nor close.

O house me, glories! Give me house and home
Here for my homelessness.
Set forth for me the wine, the honeycomb
Whereto desire saith 'Yes!'
O Senses, weave me from all lovely dust
Some home-array, some fair familiar garb
For me, exiled.
Charm me some rare anointment I may trust
Against her query, searching like a barb
The dumbness of a heart unreconciled.
Clothe me with silver; fold me from dismay;
Save me from pity. For I hear her say,
'Alas, Alas, poor child!'

'Alas, Alas, thou lost poor child, how long?
Why wilt thou suffer want?
Why must I hear thy weeping through thy song,
And see thine eyes grow gaunt?
Making sad feast upon the crumbs of light
Shed long ago from heavenly highways where
Thy brethren are!

And thy heart smoulders in thee, to be bright,
Thy one sole refuge from thy one despair,
Fraying the thwarted body with a scar.
How long, before thine eyelids, desolate,
How long shall this thy dark dominion wait
For thee, belated Star?'

Belovèd, if the Moon could weep,
Or if the Sun could see
How all these weltering alleys keep
Their outcast treasury!

O bitter, bitter-sweet! —
Beauty of babyhood, —
Earth's wistful uttermost of good
Flung out upon the street;
Fouled, even as the highways would,
With mirk and mire and bruise;
The cheek more petal-fine
Than rose before a shrine!
Those hands like star-fish in the ooze,
And fingers fain to cling
To any stronger thing!
And smiles, for one triumphal Gift,
Should one lean down, and lift!
And tendril hair; — O in such wise,
With wild lights aureoled,
The morning-glories twine and hold,
In some far paradise!

Oh well and deep, the foul ways keep
Lost treasure hid from day! —
Sun may not see: but only we,
Who look; and look away.

THE GOLDEN SHOES

THE winds are lashing on the sea;
The roads are blind with storm.
And it 's far and far away with me;
So bide you there, stay warm.
It 's forth I must, and forth to-day;
And I have no path to choose.
The highway hill, it is my way still. —
Give me my golden shoes.

God gave them me on that first day
I knew that I was young.
And I looked far forth, from west to north;
And I heard the Songs unsung.

This cloak is worn too threadbare thin,
But ah, how weatherwise!
This girdle serves to bind it in;
What heed of wondering eyes? —
And yet beside, I wear one pride
— Too bright, think you, to use? —
That I must wear, and still keep fair. —
Give here my golden shoes.

God gave them me, on that first day
I heard the Stars all chime.
And I looked forth far, from road to star;
And I knew it was far to climb.

They would buy me house and hearth, no doubt,
And the mirth to spend and share;
Could I sell that gift, and go without,
Or wear — what neighbors wear.
But take my staff, my purse, my scrip;
For I have one thing to choose.
For you, — Godspeed! May you soothe your need.
For me, my golden shoes!

He gave them me, that far, first day
When I heard all Songs unsung.
And I looked far forth, from west to north.
God saw that I was young!

NOON AT PÆSTUM

LORD of the Sea, we sun-filled creatures raise
Our hands among the clamorous weeds, — we too.
Lord of the Sun, and of the upper blue,
Of all To-morrow, and all yesterdays,
Here, where the thousand broken names and ways
Of worship are but shards we wandered through,
There is no gift to offer, or undo;
There is no prayer left in us, only praise.

Only to glory in this glory here,
Through the dead smoke of myriad sacrifice; —
To look through these blue spaces, blind and clear
Even as the seaward gaze of Homer's eyes;
And from uplifted heart, and cup, to pour
Wine to the Unknown God. — We ask no more.

VESTAL FLAME

LIGHT, light, — the last:
Till the night be done,
Keep the watch for stars and sun, and eyelids over-cast.

Once there seemed a sky,
Brooding over men.
Now no stars have come again, since their bright good-bye!

Once my dreams were wise.
Now I nothing know;
Fasting and the dark have so put out my heart's eyes.

But thy golden breath
Burns against my cheek.
I can feel and love, and seek all the rune it saith.

Do not thou be spent,
Holy thing of fire, —
Only hope of heart's desire dulled with wonderment!

While there bide these two
Hands to bar the wind;
Though such fingers chill and thinned, shed
no roses through.

While this body bends
Only for thy guard;
Like a tower, to ward and worship all the light
it sends.

It is not for fear
Lest there ring some cry
On the midnight, 'Rise and come. Lo, the
Bridegroom near!'

It is not for pride,
To be shining fair
In a wedding-garment there, lighting home the
Bride.

It is not to win
Love, for hoarded toil,
From those poor, with their spent oil, weeping,
'Light us in!' —

No; but in despite
Of all vigils set,
Do I bind me to thee yet, — strangest thing of
Light!

Only, all, for thee
Whatsoe'er thou art,
Smiling through the blinded heart, things it cannot see.

Very Soul's Desire,
Take my life; and live
By the rapture thine doth give, ecstasy of fire!

Hold thy golden breath!
For I feel, — not hear —
Spent with joy and fear to lose thee, all the song it saith.

Light, light, my own:
Do not thou disown
Thy poor keeper-of-the-light, for Light's sake alone.

The dark had left no speech save hand-in-hand
Between us two the while, with others near.
Mine questioned thine with 'Why should I be
here?'
'Yet bide thou here,' said thine, 'and understand.'

And mine was mute; but strove not then to go;
And hid itself, and murmured, 'Do not hear
The listening in my heart!' Said thine, 'My Dear,
I will not hear it, ever. But I know.'

Said mine to thine: 'Let be. Now will I go!—
For you are saying,—you who do not speak,
This hand-in-hand is one day cheek-to-cheek!'
And said thy hand around me, 'Even so.'

Then mine to thine.—'Yea, I have been alone;
—Yet happy.—This is strange. This is not I!
You hold me, but you can not tell me why.'
And said thy hand to mine again, 'My Own.'

THE PROPHET

ALL day long he kept the sheep :—
Far and early, from the crowd,
On the hills from steep to steep,
Where the silence cried aloud ;
And the shadow of the cloud
Wrapt him in a noonday sleep.

Where he dipped the water's cool,
Filling boyish hands from thence,
Something breathed across the pool
Stir of sweet enlightenments ;
And he drank, with thirsty sense,
Till his heart was brimmed and full.

Still, the hovering Voice unshed,
And the Vision unbeheld,
And the mute sky overhead,
And his longing, still withheld !
— Even when the two tears welled,
Salt, upon that lonely bread.

Vaguely blessèd in the leaves,
Dim-companioned in the sun,

Eager mornings, wistful eves,
Very hunger drew him on;
And To-morrow ever shone
With the glow the sunset weaves.

Even so, to that young heart,
Words and hands, and Men were dear;
And the stir of lane and mart
After daylong vigil here.
Sunset called, and he drew near,
Still to find his path apart.

When the Bell, with gentle tongue,
Called the herd-bells home again,
Through the purple shades he swung,
Down the mountain, through the glen;
Towards the sound of fellow-men,—
Even from the light that clung.

Dimly too, as cloud on cloud,
Came that silent flock of his:
Thronging whiteness, in a crowd,
After homing twos and threes;
With the thronging memories
Of all white things dreamed and vowed.

Through the fragrances, alone,
By the sudden-silent brook,
From the open world unknown,
To the close of speech and book;
There to find the foreign look
In the faces of his own.

Sharing was beyond his skill;
Shyly yet, he made essay:
Sought to dip, and share, and fill
Heart's-desire, from day to day.
But their eyes, some foreign way,
Looked at him; and he was still.

Last, he reached his arms to sleep,
Where the Vision waited, dim,
Still beyond some deep-on-deep.
And the darkness folded him,
Eager heart and weary limb. —
All day long, he kept the sheep.

THE LONG LANE

ALL through the summer night, down the long lane in flower,
The moon-white lane,
All through the summer night,—dim as a shower,
Glimmer and fade the Twain:
Over the cricket hosts, throbbing the hour by hour,
Young voices bloom and wane.

Down the long lane they go, and past one window, pale
With visions silver-blurred;
Stirring the heart that waits,—the eyes that fail
After a spring deferred.
Query, and hush, and Ah!—dim through a moon-lit veil,
The same one word.

Down the long lane, entwined with all the fragrance there;
The lane in flower somehow

With youth, and plighted hands, and star-strewn
air,
And muted 'Thee' and 'Thou':—
All the wild bloom and reach of dreams that
never were,
— Never to be, now.

So, in the throbbing dark, where ebbs the old
refrain,
A starved heart hears.
And silver-bright, and silver-blurred again
With moonlight and with tears.
All the long night they go, down the long sum-
mer lane,
The long, long years.

Ah but, Belovèd, men may do
All things to music; — march, and die;
And wear the longest vigil through,
. . . And say good-by.
All things to music! — Ah, but where
Peace never falls upon the air; —
These city-ways of dark and din
Where greed has shut and barred them in!
And thundering, swart against the sky,
That whirlwind, — never to go by —
Of tracks and wheels, that overhead
Beat back the senses with their roar
And menace of undying war, —
War — war — for daily bread!

All things to silence! Ah, but where
Men dwell not, but must make a lair; —
And Sorrow may not sit alone,
Nor Love hear music of its own;
And Thought that strives to breast that sea
Must struggle even for memory.
Day-long, night-long, — besieging din
To thrust all pain the deeper in! —
And drown the flutter of first-breath;
And batter at the doors of Death.

To lull their dearest: — watch their dead;
While the long thunders overhead,
Gather and break forevermore,
Eternal tides — eternal War,
War — war — Bread — bread!

ALISON'S MOTHER TO THE BROOK

BROOK, of the listening grass,
Brook of the sun-fleckt wings,
Brook of the same wild way and flickering spell!
Must you begone? Will you forever pass,
After so many years and dear to tell? —
Brook of all hoverings . . .
Brook that I kneel above;
Brook of my love.

Ah, but I have a charm to trouble you;
A spell that shall subdue
Your all-escaping heart, unheedful one
And unremembering!
Now, when I make my prayer
To your wild brightness there
That will but run and run,
O mindless Water! —
Hark, — now will I bring
A grace as wild, — my little yearling daughter,
My Alison.

Heed well that threat;
And tremble for your hill-born liberty
So bright to see! —
Your shadow-dappled way, unthwarted yet,
And the high hills whence all your dearness bubbled; —
You, never to possess!
For let her dip but once — O fair and fleet, —
Here in your shallows, yes,
Here in your silverness
Her two blithe feet, —
O Brook of mine, how shall your heart be troubled!

The heart, the bright unmothering heart of you,
That never knew. —
(O never, more than mine of long ago.
How could we know? —)
For who should guess
The shock and smiting of that perfectness? —
The lily-thrust of those ecstatic feet
Unpityingly sweet? —
Sweet beyond all the blurred blind dreams that grope
The upward paths of hope?
And who could guess

The dulcet holiness,
The lilt and gladness of those jocund feet,
Unpityingly sweet?
Ah, for your coolness that shall change and
stir
With every glee of her! —
Under the fresh amaze
That drips and glistens from her wiles and
ways;
When the endearing air
That everywhere
Must twine and fold and follow her, shall be
Rippled to ring on ring of melody, —
Music, like shadows from the joy of her,
Small starry Reveller! —
When from her triumphings, —
All frolic wings —
There soars beyond the glories of the height,
The laugh of her delight!

And it shall sound, until
Your heart stand still;
Shaken to human sight;
Struck through with tears and light;
One with the one desire
Unto that central Fire

Of Love the Sun, whence all we lighted are
Even from clod to star.

And all your glory, O most swift and sweet! —
And all your exultation only this;
To be the lowly and forgotten kiss
Beneath those feet.

You that must ever pass, —
You of the same wild way, —
The silver-bright good-bye without a look! —
You that would never stay,
For the beseeching grass . . .
Brook! —

You, Four Walls,
Wall not in my heart!
When the lovely night-time falls
All so welcomely,
Blinding, sweet hearth-fire,
Light of heart's desire,
Blind not, blind not me!
Unto them that weep apart,—
While you glow, within,
Wreckt, despairing kin,—
Dark with misery:
—Do not blind my heart!

You, close Heart!
Never hide from mine
Worlds that I divine
Through thy human dearness.
O belovèd Nearness,
Hallow all I understand
With thy hand-in-hand;—
All the lights I seek,
With thy cheek-to-cheek;
All the loveliness I loved apart.

You, heart's Home!—
Wall not in my heart.

CANTICLE OF THE BABE

I

OVER the broken world, the dark gone by,
Horror of outcast darkness torn with wars;
And timeless agony
Of the white fire, heaped high by blinded Stars,
Unfaltering, unaghast; —
Out of the midmost Fire
At last, — at last, —
A Cry! . . .
O darkness' one desire, —
O darkness, have you heard? —
Black Chaos, blindly striving towards the Word?
— The Cry!

Behold thy conqueror, Death!
Behold, behold from whom
It flutters forth, that triumph of First-Breath,
Victorious one that can but breathe and cling, —
This pulsing flower, — this weaker than a wing,
Halcyon thing! —
Cradled above unfathomable doom.

II

Under my feet, O Death,
Under my trembling feet!
Back, through the gates of hell, now give me way.
I come. — I bring new Breath!
Over the trampled shards of mine own clay,
That smoulder still, and burn,
Lo, I return!
Hail, singing Light that floats
Pulsing with chorused motes: —
Hail to thee, Sun, that lookest on all lands!
And take thou from my weak undying hands,
A precious thing, unblemished, undefiled: —
Here, on my heart uplift,
Behold the Gift, —
Thy glory and my glory, and my child!

III

(*And our eyes were opened; eyes that had been holden.*
And I saw the world, and the fruits thereof.
And I saw their glories, scarlet-stained and golden,
All a crumbled dust beneath the feet of Love.

And I saw their dreams, all of nothing worth;
But a path for Love, for Him to walk above,
And I saw new heaven, and new earth.)

IV

The grass is full of murmurs;
The sky is full of wings;
The earth is full of breath.
With voices, choir on choir
With tongues of fire,
They sing how Life out-sings —
Out-numbers Death.

V

Who are these that fly:
As doves, and as doves to the windows?
Doves, like hovering dreams round Love that slumbereth;
Silvering clouds blown by,
Doves and doves to the windows, —
Warm through the radiant sky their wings beat breath.
They are the world's new-born:
Doves, doves to the windows!

Lighting, as flakes of snow;
Lighting, as flakes of flame;
Some to the fair sown furrows;
Some to the huts and burrows
Choked of the mire and thorn, —
Deep in the city's shame.
Wind-scattered wreaths they go,
Doves, and doves, to the windows;
Some for worshipping arms, to shelter and fold,
and shrine;
Some to be torn and trodden,
Withered and waste, and sodden;
Pitiful, sacred leaves from Life's dishonored vine.

VI

O Vine of Life, that in these reaching fingers,
Urges a sunward way!
Hold here and climb, and halt not, that there
lingers
So far outstripped, my halting, wistful clay.
Make here thy foothold of my rapturous
heart, —
Yea, though the tendrils start
To hold and twine!
I am the heart that nursed

Thy sunward thirst.
A little while, a little while, O Vine,
My own and never mine,
Feed thy sweet roots with me
Abundantly.
O wonder-wildness of the pushing Bud
With hunger at the flood,
Climb on, and seek, and spurn.
Let my dull spirit learn
To follow with its longing, as it may,
While thou seek higher day. —
But thou, the reach of my own heart's desire,
Be free as fire!
Still climb and cling; and so
Outstrip, — outgrow.

O Vine of Life, my own and not my own,
So far am I outgrown!
High as I may, I lift thee, Soul's Desire.
— Lift thou me higher.

And thou, Wayfaring Woman, whom I meet
On all the highways,—every brimming street,
Lady Demeter, is it thou, grown gaunt
With work and want?
At last, and with what shamed and stricken eyes,
I see through thy disguise
Of drudge and Exile,—even the holy boon
That silvers yonder in the Harvest-moon;—
That dimly underglows
The furrows of thy worn immortal face,
With mother-grace.

O Queen and Burden-bearer, what of those
To whom thou gavest the lily and the rose
Of thy far youth? . . . For whom,
Out of the wondrous loom
Of thine enduring body, thou didst make
Garments of beauty, cunningly adorned,
But only for Death's sake!
Largess of life, but to lie waste and scorned.—
Could not such cost of pain,
Nor daily utmost of thy toil prevail?—
But they must fade, and pale,
And wither from thy desolated throne?—

And still no Summer give thee back again
Thine own?

Lady of Sorrows,—Mother,—Drudge august,
Behold me in the dust.

GLADNESS

UNTO my Gladness then I cried:
'I will not be denied!
Answer me now; and tell me why
Thou dost not fall, as a broken star
Out of the Dark where such things are,
And where such bright things die.
How canst thou, with thy fountain dance
Shatter clear sight with radiance? —
How canst thou reach and soar, and fling,
Over my heart's dark shuddering,
Unearthly lights on everything?
What dost thou see? What dost thou know?'
My Gladness said to me, bowed below,
'Gladness I am: created so.'

'And dare'st thou, in my mortal veins
Sing, with the Spring's descending rains?
While in this hour, and momently,
Forth of myself I look, and see
Torn treasure of my heart's Desire;
And human glories in the mire,

That should make glad some paradise! —
The childhood strewn in foulest place,
The girlhood, plundered of its grace;
The eyelids shut upon spent eyes
That never looked upon thy face!
Answer me, thou, if answer be!'

My Gladness said to me:
'Weep if thou wilt; yea, weep, and doubt.
I may not let the Sun go out.'

Then to my Gladness still I cried:
'And how canst thou abide? —
Here, where my listening heart must hark
These sorrows rising from the Dark
Where still they starve, and strive and die,
Who bear each heaviest penalty
Of humanhood; — nor grasp, nor guess,
The garment's hem of happiness! —
The spear-wound throbbing in my song,
It throbs more bitterly than wrong, —
It burns more wildly than despair, —
The will to share,
The will to share!
Little I knew, — the blind-fold I, —

Joy would become like agony, —
Like arrows of the Sun in me!

. . . . . .

I hold thee here. I have thee, now, —
And I am human. But what art thou!'

My Gladness answered me:
'Wayfarer, wilt thou understand? —
Follow me on. And keep my hand.'

THE NIGHTINGALE UNHEARD

THE NIGHTINGALE UNHEARD

YES, Nightingale, through all the summer-time
We followed on, from moon to golden moon;
From where Salerno day-dreams in the noon,
And the far rose of Pæstum once did climb.
All the white way beside the girdling blue,
Through sun-shrill vines and campanile chime,
We listened; — from the old year to the new.
Brown bird, and where were you?

You, that Ravello lured not, throned on high
And filled with singing out of sun-burned throats!
Nor yet Minore of the flame-sailed boats;
Nor yet — of all bird-song should glorify —
Assisi, Little Portion of the blest,
Assisi, in the bosom of the sky,
Where God's own singer thatched his sunward nest;
That little, heavenliest!

And north and north, to where the hedge-rows are,
That beckon with white looks an endless way;
Where, through the fair wet silverness of May,
A lamb shines out as sudden as a star,
Among the cloudy sheep; and green, and pale,
The may-trees reach and glimmer, near or far,
And the red may-trees wear a shining veil.
— And still, no nightingale!

The one vain longing, — through all journeyings,
The one: in every hushed and hearkening spot, —
All the soft-swarming dark where you were not,
Still longed for! Yes, for sake of dreams and wings,
And wonders, that your own must ever make
To bower you close, with all hearts' treasurings;
And for that speech toward which all hearts do ache; —
Even for Music's sake.

But most, his music whose belovèd name
Forever writ in water of bright tears,
Wins to one grave-side even the Roman years,
That kindle there the hallowed April flame
Of comfort-breathing violets. By that shrine
Of Youth, Love, Death, forevermore the same,
Violets still! — When falls, to leave no sign,
The arch of Constantine.

Most for his sake we dreamed. Tho' not as he,
From that lone spirit, brimmed with human woe,
Your song once shook to surging overflow.
How was it, sovran dweller of the tree,
His cry, still throbbing in the flooded shell
Of silence with remembered melody,
Could draw from you no answer to the spell?
— O Voice, O Philomel?

Long time we wondered (and we knew not why): —
Nor dream, nor prayer, of wayside gladness born,
Nor vineyards waiting, nor reproachful thorn,
Nor yet the nested hill-towns set so high
All the white way beside the girdling blue, —

Nor olives, gray against a golden sky,
Could serve to wake that rapturous voice of you!
But the wise silence knew.

O Nightingale unheard! — Unheard alone,
Throughout that woven music of the days
From the faint sea-rim to the market-place,
And ring of hammers on cathedral stone! —
So be it, better so: that there should fail
For sun-filled ones, one blessèd thing unknown.
To them, be hid forever, — and all hail!
Sing never, Nightingale.

Sing, for the others! Sing; to some pale cheek
Against the window, like a starving flower.
Loose, with your singing, one poor pilgrim hour
Of journey, with some Heart's Desire to seek.
Loose, with your singing, captives such as these
In misery and iron, hearts too meek,
For voyage — voyage over dreamful seas
To lost Hesperides.

Sing not for free-men. Ah, but sing for whom
The walls shut in; and even as eyes that fade,

The windows take no heed of light nor
shade,—
The leaves are lost in mutterings of the loom.
Sing near! So in that golden overflowing
They may forget their wasted human bloom;
Pay the devouring days their all, unknow-
ing,—
Reck not of life's bright going!

Sing not for lovers, side by side that hark;
Nor unto parted lovers, save they be
Parted indeed by more than makes the Sea.
Where never hope shall meet — like mounting
lark —
Far Joy's uprising; and no memories
Abide to star the music-haunted dark:
To them that sit in darkness, such as these,
Pour down, pour down heart's-ease.

Not in kings' gardens. No; but where there
haunt
The world's forgotten, both of men and
birds;
The alleys of no hope and of no words,
The hidings where men reap not, though they
plant;

But toil and thirst — so dying and so born ; —
And toil and thirst to gather to their want,
From the lean waste, beyond the daylight's scorn,
— To gather grapes of thorn!

. . . . . .

And for those two, your pilgrims without tears,
Who prayed a largess where there was no dearth,
Forgive it to their human-happy ears :
Forgive it them, brown music of the Earth,
Unknowing, — though the wiser silence knew!
Forgive it to the music of the spheres
That while they walked together so, the Two
Together, — heard not you.

ENVOI

Belovèd, till the day break,
Leave wide the little door;
And bless, to lack and longing,
Our brimming more-and-more.

Is love a scanted portion,
That we should hoard thereof? —
Oh, call unto the deserts,
Belovèd and my Love!

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